DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 096 CG 019 830

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TITLE Type A Behavior Pattern and Relationship Quality among College Dating Couples.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 39p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (94th, Washington, DC, August 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attribution Theory; College Students; Conflict; *Conflict Resolution; *Dating (Social); Higher Education; *Individual Differences; Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship; Life Satisfaction; Mate Selection; *Personality Traits
IDENTIFIERS *Type A Behavior; *Type B Behavior

ABSTRACT

Researchers have begun to recognize that because Type A and Type B behavior patterns represent pervasive lifestyles, they may have general implications for various psychological phenomena. One area of interest concerns the influence of Type A and B behavior on the quality and functioning of interpersonal relationships. A study was conducted to investigate the influence of Type A and B behavior by members of dating couples on their relationship satisfaction, commitment, and long-term intentions. Thirty-one dating couples, all university students, completed questionnaires measuring Type A or B behavior patterns, partner's behavior patterns, quality of relationship, and dating history. Subjects also completed four biweekly questionnaires measuring conflict and conflict resolution, attribution of blame, quality of communication, and relationship satisfaction and commitment. Results indicated that partners with contrasting behavioral orientations were more committed to their relationships, and had higher intentions to marry their partners, than did couples where partners had similar behavior styles. One contributing factor to this difference appeared to be the manner in which couples resolved conflict. Couples with contrasting behavioral styles were less likely than couples with similar behavioral styles to use a confrontational style of conflict resolution. Type A females were more likely than Type B females to blame partners for relationship conflict, suggesting that the Type A self-serving bias may be disruptive in interpersonal relationships. (Author/NB)

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Type A Behavior Pattern and Relationship Quality Among College Dating Couples

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Running Head: TYPE A AND DATING SATISFACTION

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of Type A and B behavior by members of dating couples on their relationship satisfaction, commitment, and long-term intentions. Results indicated that partners with contrasting behavioral orientations were more committed to their relationships, and had higher intentions to marry their partners, than did couples where partners had similar behavioral styles. One contributing factor to this difference appeared to be the manner in which couples resolved conflict. Couples with contrasting behavioral styles were less likely than couples with similar behavioral styles to use a confrontational style of conflict resolution. It was also found that female Type As were more likely than female Type Bs to blame their partners for conflict in the relationship, suggesting that the self-serving bias exhibited by Type As in other contexts may be disruptive in the interpersonal realm.

Type A Behavior Pattern and Relationship Quality Among College Dating Couples

During the past two decades, intense efforts have been directed toward examining the role of Type A behavior in the etiology of coronary heart disease (for reviews, see Contrada, Wright, & Glass, 1984; Matthews, 1982; Matthews & Haynes, 1986; Siegel, 1984; Wright, Contrada, & Glass, 1985). Although there is still some controversy concerning the precise pathophysiological processes involved, evidence clearly indicates that Type A behavior is an independent risk factor for coronary disease (Review Panel, 1981).

More recently, researchers have begun to recognize that because the Type A and B patterns represent pervasive lifestyles, they may have general implications for a broad range of psychological phenomena (e.g., Sanders & Malkis, 1982; Strube, in press). One area of particular interest has been the influence of Type A and B behavior on the quality and functioning of interpersonal relationships. Because Type A behavior is characterized by a competitive orientation, the pattern may have the effect of degrading interpersonal relationships that ordinarily thrive on a more cooperative or egalitarian style.

Consequently, poor intimate interpersonal relations may be a significant source of stress for Type As (cf. Blaney, Brown, & Blaney, 1986). The study of Type A behavior and its impact on interpersonal relations is thus justified on two accounts: (a) interpersonal stress may prove to be an important precursor to coronary risk among Type As (cf. Blaney et al., 1986), and (b) regardless of of its coronary risk implications, the study of pervasive behavior patterns, such as Type A and B, may provide unique insights into the functioning of intimate interpersonal relations. In this latter regard it is useful to note that the competitive, hard-driving, dominant Type A style is at odds with the traditional female sex role stereotype (cf. DeGregorio & Carver, 1980). Consequently, the presence of a female Type A may pose a particularly difficult adjustment in relationships that rely, at least initially, on traditional norms for guidance as to appropriate interpersonal behavior (cf. Rosenberger & Strube, 1986).[1] Stated differently, the same behaviors may have different consequences for relationships when exhibited by men and women because those behaviors may not match prevailing sex role stereotypes.

Past research is clear in demonstrating the deleterious effects of Type A behavior on marital relations. Burke and his colleagues (Burke, Weir, & DuWors, 1979; Burke & Weir, 1980), Becker and Byrne (1984), and Blaney, Brown, and Blaney (1986) have all found Type A behavior exhibited by one or both members of a married couple to produce lower marital satisfaction. In our own research with dating couples (Rosenberger & Strube, 1986), we have also found that Type A behavior degrades relationship satisfaction, particularly when exhibited by the female partner. What these studies don't provide, however, is insight into the relationship dynamics that govern relationship satisfaction. That is, although it is clear that being a Type A or Type B influences levels of satisfaction with the relationship, it is not clear what Type As and Bs do differently in their relationships to produce these differences in satisfaction. The present study examined conflict and conflict resolution as one possible source of relationship dissatisfaction among dating couples varying in Type A-B composition.

We focused on conflict for several reasons. First, one characteristic Type A response to stress is easily aroused hostility (e.g., Carver & Glass, 1978;

Strube, Turner, Patrick, & Perrillo, 1984). Thus Type As may be prone to more relationship conflict by virtue of their greater susceptibility to anger. Second, Type As have also been found to be more self-serving than Type Bs in the attributions they make regarding success and failure (e.g., Strube, 1985; Strube & Boland, 1986). In terms of conflict interpretation, it is possible that Type As are more reluctant than Type Bs to accept blame for relationship problems, contributing to relationship stress. Finally, the Type As' general competitive, hard-driving orientation suggests that their preferred mode of conflict resolution may be more aggressive and confrontational rather than assertive and empathic, producing less satisfying resolutions to the conflicts that arise. Consequently, we expected that the disruptive influence of Type A behavior on relationship satisfaction would stem at least in part from the magnitude of conflict and how that conflict is interpreted and resolved. Furthermore, based on the results obtained by Rosenberger and Strube, we anticipated that the influence of Type A behavior on relationship dynamics would be more pronounced when exhibited by the female partner.

Methods

Subjects

University dating couples were recruited to participate in the study through notices posted around the college campus and through direct requests. The overall sample consisted of 31 dating couples; the average duration of relationships was 12 months.

Procedure

A preliminary session was scheduled for couples during which they completed identical questionnaire packets, containing three separate measures. The first questionnaire was the Jenkins Activity Survey (JAS) Form T, a student-adapted measure of Type A and B behavior patterns (Krantz, Glass, & Snyder, 1974).[2] The second questionnaire was an adaptation of the JAS on which individuals were asked to assess their partners' behavior patterns. This provided a measure of the degree to which the partner's behavior style was salient to the respondent. In addition, subjects completed Rubin's Liking and Loving Scales to indicate the overall perceived quality of the relationship (Rubin, 1970). Finally, additional questions provided insight into the individuals' dating history. These questions included reports of the length of time partners had both known and dated one another, the

degree of religious similarity between partners, and the number and seriousness of partners' previous dating relationships.

The major dependent measures were collected four times over the course of an academic semester. We chose this time frame because it represents a time span within which college dating couples must confront the typical range and number of stressors characteristic of college life. By this repeated measurement we hoped to capture a representative sample of conflicts. Upon completion of the first session, participants were asked for a convenient date to commence the biweekly questionnaires after which they would be expected to return every other week.

The biweekly questionnaires contained a total of 22 questions. Several of these more specific questions were combined to form composites and thus reduce the total number of variables that were subsequently analyzed (from 22 to 11). For example, three items measured the magnitude of conflict (presence of conflicting attitudes, amount of time spent in conflict, and degree to which conflicts were threatening to the relationship) and were summed to form a single composite. Subjects also rated who was

responsible for the conflicts (self vs. partner). Conflict resolution styles were assessed by two questions measuring the degree to which the partner used a confrontational style, and the degree to which the partner used an assertive vs. aggressive style.

Five questions were designed to measure the quality of communication between partners. These questions included an assessment of the overall quality of communication, and ratings of the respondent's openness to express feelings during conflict, the partner's willingness to listen during conflict, the frequency with which problems were approached when there was sufficient time to discuss them, and the extent to which the couple shared private thoughts and feelings. These ratings were combined to form a single index of communication quality.

Finally, questions were included to measure relationship satisfaction and commitment. Satisfaction was assessed by four questions that measured level of affection between the partners, attractiveness of the partner, favorableness of the relationship relative to alternatives, and general satisfaction. These items were combined. Six questions assessed commitment and included ratings of the appeal of being without the

current romantic relationship, the magnitude of loss that would be experienced were the relationship to end, the degree to which the respondent's happiness depended on the success of the relationship, the extent to which conversations with the partner included discussion of long-term goals, the amount of threat created by thoughts of breaking up, and the degree to which the respondent was content to not plan very far ahead in the relationship. These six ratings were combined to form a commitment index. A final question asked respondents to estimate the likelihood that they would marry their current partner. Although this latter question also assessed commitment, it was analyzed separately because it duplicated a question used by Rosenberger and Strube (1986).

The biweekly questionnaires used 9-point rating scales throughout. To encourage subjects to pay explicit attention to each question independently, neither the assigning of endpoint labels nor the direction of scale numbering were kept constant.

Results

Males and females were classified as Type As or Type Bs based upon median splits of their scores on the Jenkins Activity Survey. Males scoring $\geq$ 10 and

females scoring $\geq$ 7 were classified as Type A, and males scoring $\leq$ 9 and females scoring $\leq$ 6 were classified as Type B. These score distributions are similar to past research that typically finds males to score higher than their female counterparts on the JAS (Glass, 1977). On the basis of this distinction, the following numbers of Type A-B couple compositions were obtained: Type A male-Type A female, n=8; Type A male-Type B female, n=8; Type B male-Type A female, n=7; Type B male-Type B female, n=8. The similar numbers of each type of couple suggests that behavioral style does not play a strong role in the initiation of dating relationships, consistent with past research (cf. Blaney et al., 1986; Croog, Koslowsky, & Levine, 1976; Haynes, Eaker, & Feinleib, 1983; Rosenberger & Strube, 1986).

The analyses reported below represent a 2 x 2 x 2 (Type A vs. B status of male x Type A vs. B status of female x male vs female) analyses of variance, with the latter factor treated as a nested variable. Analyses of the biweekly questionnaires included a repeated measures component as well to account for the four measurement periods. The only exception to this analysis scheme occured for some of the dating history

variables and for subject perceptions of the partner's Type A or B behavior. In these cases, separate analyses were conducted for males and females. Because some subjects did not complete all materials, error degrees of freedom vary slightly in the analyses reported below.

Perceptions of Type A Behavior

An initial analysis examined perceptions of partners' Type A behavior. In order to argue that behavior patterns have an influence on relationship dynamics, it must be demonstrated that the patterns are easily recognized by the individuals involved. Results indicated that both males and females accurately recognized the Type A or B behavior of their partners. Females completing the JAS with respect to their male partners provided higher ratings of Type A behavior if the male was in fact a self-rated Type A (M=10.44) than if the male was a self-rated Type B (M=5.04), $F(1,27)=19.13$, $p<.001$. Likewise, males provided higher JAS scores for self-rated Type A partners (M=9.16) than for self-rated Type B partners (M=6.69), $F(1,27)=5.23$, $p<.05$.

Dating History

Couples did not differ in either the length of

their acquaintance (all Fs<1.23), the length of their relationships (all Fs<1.92), or the similarity of partners' religious affiliations (all Fs<1.06). Analysis of the reported number of previous relationships, however, did reveal several differences. Regardless of the behavior pattern of the male partners, Type A females (M=11.19) reported participating in significantly more previous dating relationships than did Type B females (M=4.14), $F(1,25)=14.80$, $p<.05$. In addition, Type A females (M=2.54) reported a greater number of serious past relationships than did Type B females (M=1.50). Though this latter result was only marginally significant ($F(1,27)=3.43$, $p=.075$), it is worth noting that similar findings have been obtained by Rosenberger and Strube (1986).

Loving and Liking

The analysis of Rubin's Liking and Loving scales indicated no significant differences between Type As and Bs, but did indicate reliable sex differences. Males reported more loving feelings (M=93.06) than did females (M=87.29), $F(1,27)=4.51$, $p<.05$. By contrast, females reported more liking for their partners (M=91.29) than did males (M=84.81), $F(1,27)=6.08$,

$p<.05$. This latter result has been obtained in earlier research by Rubin (1970).

Biweekly Questionnaires

The primary source of data for this study came from the four biweekly questionnaires. To aid interpretation, the 3 df associated with the repeated measure were partitioned into single df effects corresponding to the linear, quadratic, and cubic trends. Only linear and quadratic effects of substantive interest are reported here. Results are reported first for satisfaction and commitment to provide a link to past research.

Satisfaction and Commitment. Analyses of the satisfaction composite indicated only that couples were more satisfied at the beginning and end of the semester than during the middle of the semester, Quadratic component, $F(1, 20)=5.72$, $p<.05$. The commitment composite, however, indicated a significant Male Type x Female Type x Linear interaction, $F(1, 20)=7.21$, $p<.025$. As the means in Figure 1 indicate, couples where the partners had contrasting behavioral styles became more committed to their relationships over time, whereas partners with similar behavior patterns became less committed over the course of the semester.

Analyses of the separate linear trends indicated that only the decline for couples where both were Type Bs was significant, $F(1, 20)=6.53$, $p<.05$, remaining $Fs \leq 2.32$. The simpler Male Type x Female Type interaction was also reliable, $F(1, 20)=4.32$, $p<.05$. Couples with contrasting behavioral styles (male Type A-female Type B, $M= 6.42$, male Type B-female Type A, $M=6.22$) were more committed overall than were couples with similar behavioral styles (both Type As, $M=5.81$, both Type Bs, $M=5.53$).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Respondents were also asked to estimate the likelihood that they would marry their current partners. Analyses of these ratings indicated a significant Male Type x Female Type interaction that resembled that obtained for the commitment composite, $F(1, 20)=5.78$, $p<.05$. Couples with Type A males and Type B females ($M=6.67$) and couples with Type B males and Type A females ($M=6.98$) rated the likelihood of marriage as higher than couples where both partners were Type As ($M=4.98$) or both were Type Bs ($M=4.02$). Taken together, these results suggest a more complex

relation between Type A behavior and relationship commitment than that reported by Rosenberger and Strube (1986), who found commitment depended only on the females' Type A-B status. A comparison of these two studies will be deferred until the discussion.

Conflict. As expected, Type A behavior proved to be an important moderator of conflict and its resolution. Analysis of the conflict composite indicated a reliable Female Type x Linear interaction, $F(1, 19)=4.64$, $p<.05$. This interaction (see Figure 2) indicated a significant decline in conflict for couples with Type B females (linear component, $F(1, 19)=8.41$, $p<.01$) but no significant linear trend for couples with Type A females, $F(1, 19)=.05$. As a consequence, although couples with Type B females demonstrated a tendency to report more conflict initially (Time 1, $F(1, 19)=3.39$, $p<.10$), no differences were apparent later in the semester (remaining $Fs \leq 1.90$).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Respondents also rated the extent to which they blamed themselves versus their partners for the conflicts. Analyses indicated a significant Female

Type x Male vs. Female x Linear interaction, $F(1, 20)=9.33$, $p<.01$. Examination of separate linear trends (see Figure 3) indicated that over time, female Type As increasingly blamed their partners for conflicts, $F(1, 20)=17.39$, $p<.001$. Their male partners, however, tended to increasingly blame themselves, although the trend was not significant, $F(1, 20)=2.51$. Members of couples where the female was a Type B did not change their attributions for conflict over time ($Fs \leq .29$).

Insert Figure 3 about here

Analyses of the questionnaire item measuring the use of a confrontational conflict resolution style indicated a significant Male Type x Female Type x Linear interaction, $F(1, 20)=7.40$, $p<.025$. Examination of the means (see Figure 4) suggests that couples with two Type Bs maintain a constant and high level of confrontation in dealing with conflict, and that couples with two Type As increase their use of this tactic over time. By contrast, couples with one Type A and one Type B exhibited decreases in their use of confrontation. Examination of separate linear components indicated that the increase for couples with

two Type As, and the decrease for couples with a Type A male and a Type B female, were reliable ($F(1, 20)=6.10$, $p<.05$, $F(1, 20)= 5.20$, $p<.05$, respectively, remaining $Fs\leq.81$).

Insert Figure 4 about here

Respondents also rated the degree to which partners used an assertive (clearly express feelings) versus an aggressive (make hasty claims, putdowns, etc.) conflict resolution style. Males were more likely to claim that their partners acted aggressively ($M=4.13$) than did females ($M=2.54$), $F(1, 20)=16.02$, $p<.001$. This sex difference was also dependent on Male Type and Female Type, $F(1, 20)=6.61$, $p<.025$. Examination of separate couple combinations indicated that males and females did not provide reliably different ratings when both were Type As (Male M=3.07, Female M=3.50, F(1, 20)=.35). By contrast, all other couples exhibited significant sex differences: Male Type A-female Type B ($M=5.15$ vs. 2.60, $F(1, 20)=8.76$, $p<.01$), male Type B-female Type A ($M=4.45$ vs. 1.75, $F(1, 20)=9.80$, $p<.01$), male Type B-female Type B ($M=3.86$ vs. 2.29, $F(1, 20)=4.62$, $p<.05$). The sexes

were found to exhibit different linear trends as well, (Male vs. Female x Linear, $F(1, 20)=5.21$, $p<.05$) with males exhibiting a declining tendency to view their partners as aggressive over time.

Communication. Quality of communication was not moderated by Type A behavior but it was viewed differently by males and females, $F(1, 19)=8.88$, $p<.01$: Females rated communication as being of higher quality ($M=6.71$) than did males ($M=6.28$).

Discussion

Taken together, the results of this study indicate that relationship commitment and long-term intentions in dating couples are influenced by the behavioral orientations of both the male and female partners. In this case, "opposites attract" in that partners with contrasting behavior patterns were found to report greater commitment and intentions to marry than partners with similar behavioral orientations. Moreover, these differences may stem, at least in part, from the way these couples resolve conflict. Although couples with similar and contrasting behavior patterns did not differ in their overall levels of conflict, couples with contrasting behavioral styles reported that their partners were less likely to use a

confrontational style of conflict resolution.

These results contrast with those obtained by Rosenberger and Strube (1986) who found that the Type A or B behavior of the female, and not the male, determined marriage intentions and actual relationship stability. There is a crucial difference between the samples examined in the two studies that may account for the different results, and which points to a potentially important moderator variable. The couples in the Rosenberger and Strube study had been dating for an average of 15 weeks whereas the couples in the current study had been dating for an average of 12 months. It may be that Type A behavior on the part of the female is particularly threatening very early in the relationship because it violates the traditional expectations that serve to guide partners that don't know eachother well. If the relationship can survive to a stage of greater intimacy, however, the impact of Type A or B behavior exhibited by males and females may change. Later in a relationship, complimentary behavioral styles may enhance relationships because of the additional and different resources that each member can contribute, possibly allowing couples smoother transition through change and conflict. Although,

certainly, similarity on many dimensions is critical to relationship survival (Black, 1974; Brehm, 1985), research indicates that complementary attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors may be an important factor for advancement to more committed relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Brehm, 1985; Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962). The present study supports this latter contention. Note, however, that complementarity may not be universally more beneficial. Blaney et al. (1986) found the greatest marital discord in couples with a Type A husband and a Type B wife. Apparently, other relationship factors (perhaps marital versus dating status) moderate the influence of behavioral style. Additional research will be necessary to investigate these possibilities.

Although the behavior patterns of males and females interacted to influence commitment, the females' behavior pattern independently influenced other aspects of the relationship. Most apparent were moderating effects of the female's Type A or B style on attributions of responsibility for conflict. Couples with Type B females did not demonstrate changes in attributions over time, and males and females in these couples did not differ in their ascriptions of blame.

Female Type As, however, demonstrated an increasing tendency to blame their male partners for conflict, and the males demonstrated a nonsignificant tendency to accept such blame. The attributions reported by Type A women are similar to the self-serving performance attributions exhibited by Type As in other research (e.g., Strube, 1985; Strube & Boland, 1986), and validate what appears to be a widespread cognitive-perceptual response to evaluative settings. An important implication is that self-serving attributions in the context of a couple attempting to resolve conflict may be quite destructive in that it could prevent individuals from recognizing their own role in the couple's problems and may discourage an egalitarian conflict resolution style.

When the present results are placed in the context of past research on Type A behavior and interpersonal relations, an interesting picture begins to emerge. Overall, Type A behavior is typically found to be disruptive to the functioning of intimate interpersonal relationships. But the pattern of disruption is not consistent over the life of the relationship. It appears that early in the relationship, the behavior pattern of the woman is particularly influential (e.g.,

Rosenberger & Strube, 1986; this study). This may stem from the disruption caused by the "counternormative" behavior exhibited by Type A women (cf. DeGregorio & Carver, 1980). As the relationship progresses, however, the man's behavior pattern also influences relationship quality, possibly because of the increasing importance of achievement in the work setting which detracts from attention to spouse and family (cf. Burke et al., 1979; Burke & Weir, 1980). It is also clear, however, that the behavior patterns of men and women interact to influence relationship discord and that the combinations producing the most harmonious relations may not be constant over the duration of a relationship. Future research, particularly longitudinal studies, may help to further disentangle the complexities of Type A behavior and its influence on intimate interpersonal relations. The potential benefits are a better understanding of the sources of interpersonal stress experienced by Type As and Bs, and in general, a better understanding of the manner in which pervasive behavioral orientations -- lifestyles -- influence our most important interpersonal encounters.

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Footnotes

[1]Note that we are not arguing for the appropriateness of traditional sex roles. Rather, we argue that changes in the roles of men and women in interpersonal relations have lagged behind the changing roles of women in other arenas, such as the work setting. Consequently, nonstereotypic behavior by women in the interpersonal realm may be viewed as more disruptive.

[2]We chose the JAS as the assessment procedure for this study for two reasons: (1) past research examining intimate relationships among Type As and Bs has used the JAS and we wished to ensure comparability of assessment procedures, and (2) our procedure required an estimate by each respondent of their partner's behavioral style; such an assessment is best obtained with the JAS questionnaire format. It is important to note, however, that the JAS and the Structured Interview (SI, another prevalent measure of Type A) agree only modestly in their assessment of Type A behavior (see Matthews, Krantz, Dembroski, & MacDougall, 1982; Musante, MacDougall, & Dembroski, 1983). Thus results obtained with one procedure may not generalize to samples assessed by the other

procedure. Although both have been found to be predictive of coronary disease (Brand, 1978; Matthews & Haynes, 1986, Siegel, 1984; Zyzanski, 1978), they appear to tap somewhat nonoverlapping aspects of the pattern. Past research suggests that the JAS taps primarily cognitive and perceptual factors that are more related to psychological processes whereas the SI appears to be more related to behavioral and physiological reactivity (for more extensive discussions, see Matthews, 1982; Strube, in press).

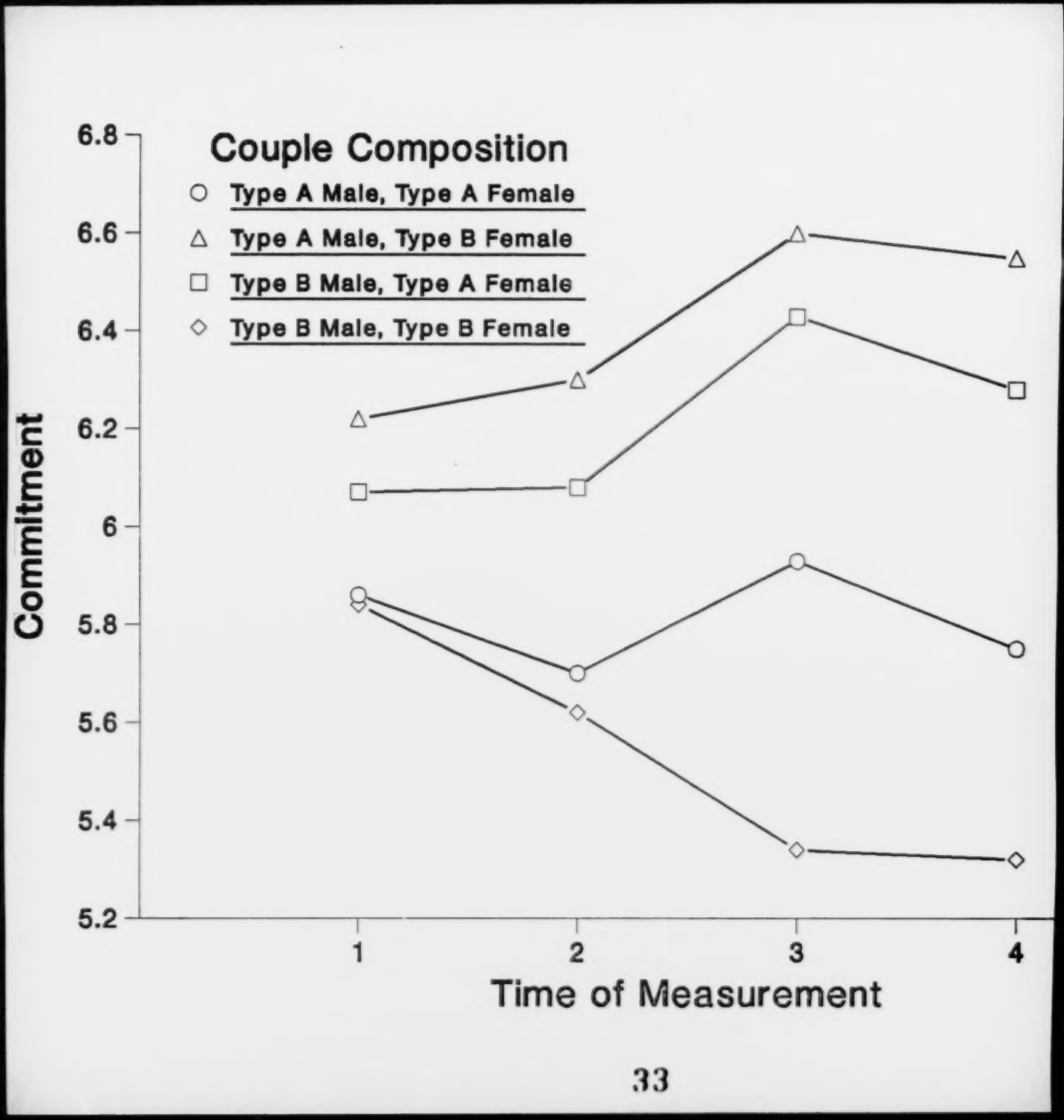
Figure Captions

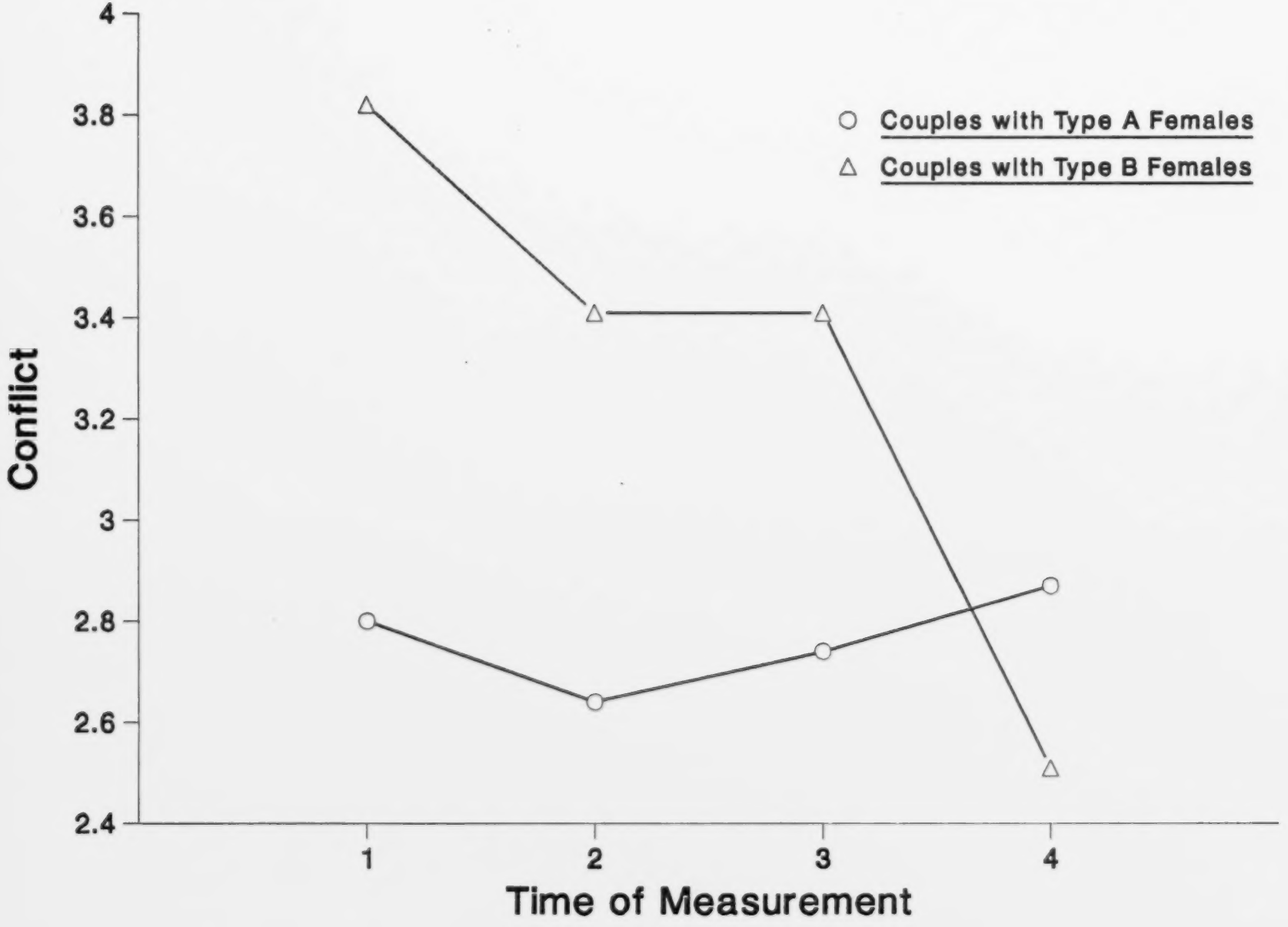
Figure 1. Commitment as a function of females' behavior pattern, males' behavior pattern, and time of measurement.

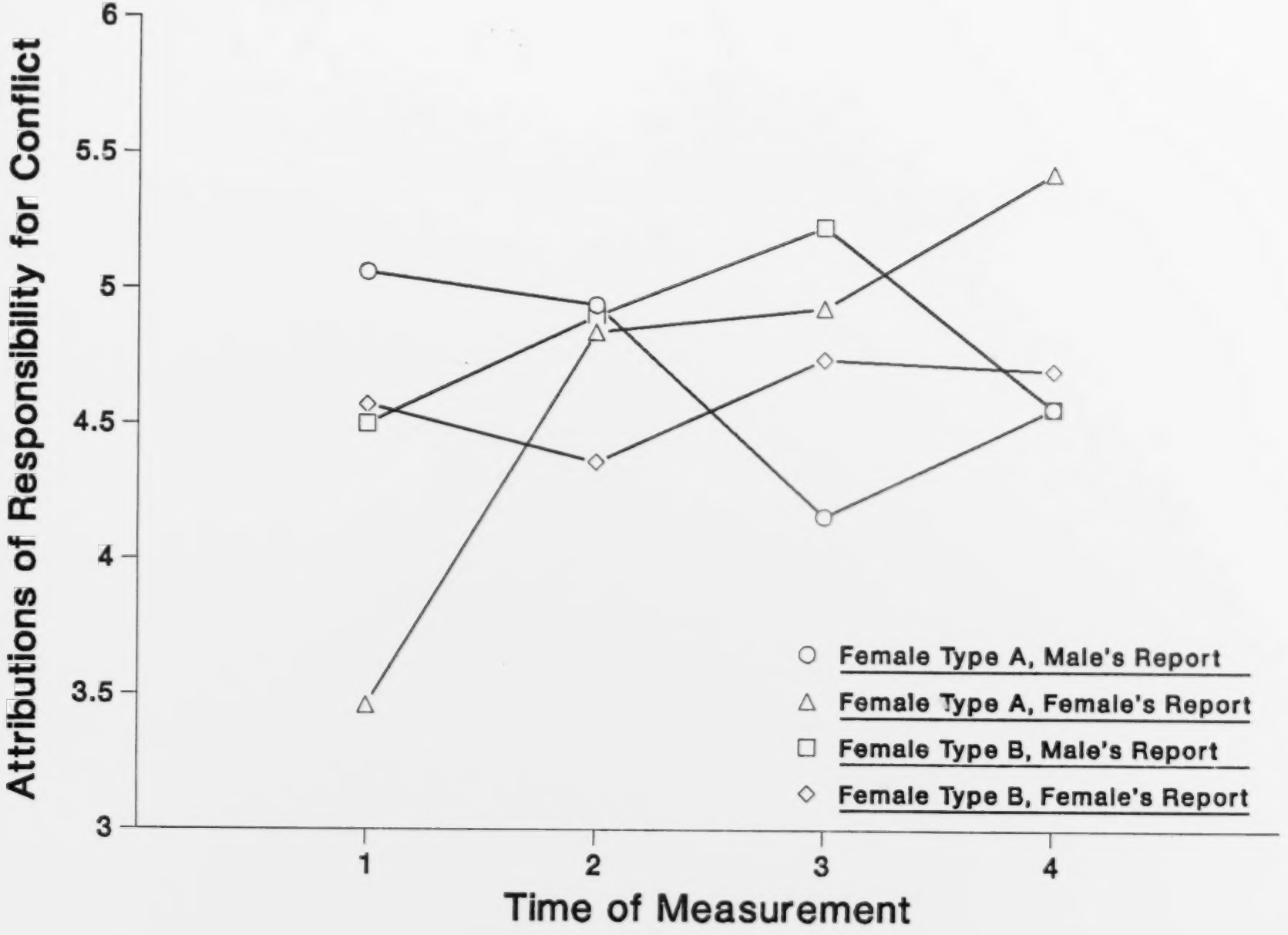
Figure 2. Conflict as a function of females' behavior pattern and time of measurement.

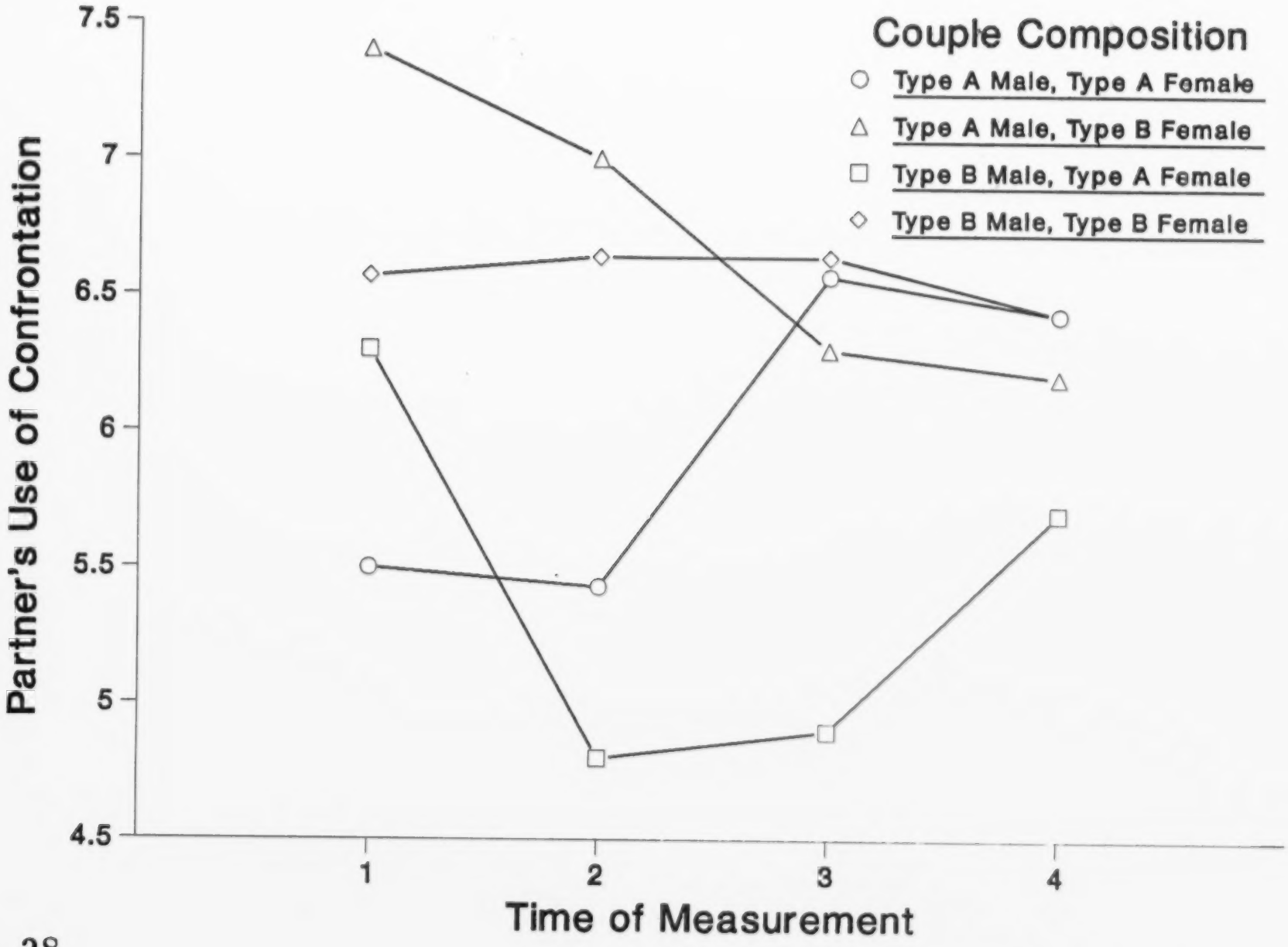
Figure 3. Attributions of responsibility for conflict as a function of gender, females' behavior pattern, and time of measurement.

Figure 4. Partner's conflict resolution style (confrontation vs. withdrawal) as a function of females' behavior pattern, males' behavior pattern, and time of measurement.


Couple Composition
Type A Male, Type A Female
Type A Male, Type B Female
Type B Male, Type A Female
Type B Male, Type B Female
Commitment
6.8
6.6
6.4
6.2
6
5.8
5.6
5.4
5.2
1
2
3
4
Time of Measurement


Conflict
4
3.8
3.6
3.4
3.2
3
2.8
2.6
2.4
1
2
3
4
Time of Measurement
Couples with Type A Females
Couples with Type B Females


Attributions of Responsibility for Conflict
6
5.5
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
1
2
3
4
Time of Measurement
Female Type A, Male's Report
Female Type A, Female's Report
Female Type B, Male's Report
Female Type B, Female's Report


Couple Composition
Type A Male, Type A Female
Type A Male, Type B Female
Type B Male, Type A Female
Type B Male, Type B Female
Partner's Use of Confrontation
7.5
7
6.5
6
5.5
5
4.5
1
2
3
4
Time of Measurement